

Appendix table 7-9

Correct answers to scientific terms and concept questions: 1985–2008

(Percent)

| Question | 1985 (n = 2,003) | 1988 (n = 2,041) | 1990 (n = 2,005) | 1992 (n = 1,995) | 1995 (n = 2,006) | 1997 (n = 2,000) | 1999 (n = 1,882) | 2001 (n = 1,574) | 2004 (n = 2,025) | 2006 (n = 1,864) | 2008 (n = 1,505) |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <i>The center of the Earth is very hot. (True)</i> | NA | 80 | 79 | 81 | 78 | 82 | 80 | 80 | 78 | 80 | 84 |
| <i>The continents on which we live have been moving their locations for millions of years and will continue to move in the future. (True)</i> | 79 | 80 | 77 | 79 | 78 | 78 | 80 | 79 | 77 | 80 | 77 |
| <i>Does the Earth go around the Sun, or does the Sun go around the Earth? (Earth around Sun)</i> | NA | 73 | 73 | 71 | 73 | 73 | 72 | 75 | 71 | 76 | 72 |
| <i>It is the mother's gene that decides whether the baby is a boy or a girl. (False)</i> | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | 71 ^a |
| <i>It is the father's gene that decides whether the baby is a boy or a girl. (True)</i> | NA | NA | NA | 65 | 64 | 62 | 66 | 65 | 62 | 64 | 62 ^a |
| <i>All radioactivity is man-made. (False)</i> | NA | 65 | 63 | 73 | 72 | 71 | 71 | 76 | 73 | 70 | 70 |
| <i>Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria. (False)</i> | NA | 26 | 30 | 35 | 40 | 43 | 45 | 51 | 54 | 56 | 54 |
| <i>Electrons are smaller than atoms. (True)</i> | NA | 43 | 41 | 46 | 44 | 43 | 46 | 48 | 45 | 53 | 53 |
| <i>How long does it take for the Earth to go around the Sun? (One year)</i> | NA | 45 | 48 | 46 | 47 | 48 | 49 | 54 | NA | 55 | 51 |
| <i>Lasers work by focusing sound waves. (False)</i> | NA | 36 | 37 | 37 | 40 | 39 | 43 | 45 | 42 | 45 | 49 |

NA = not available, question not asked

^aQuestion about "father's gene" asked of 1,251 survey respondents. Question about "mother's gene" asked of 254 survey respondents.

NOTES: Table includes all years for which data collected. "Don't know" responses and refusals to respond counted as incorrect.

SOURCES: National Science Foundation, Division of Science Resources Statistics, Survey of Public Attitudes Toward and Understanding of Science and Technology (1985–2001); University of Michigan, Survey of Consumer Attitudes (2004); and University of Chicago, National Opinion Research Center, General Social Survey (2006, 2008).

Science and Engineering Indicators 2010